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# GHOSTLY CITIES

## SOME NOTES ON URBAN BRANDING AND THE IMAGINING OF PLACES

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### Introduction

The encounter with a city is, obviously, to some degree, an emotional encounter, involving expectations and imaginations. Consider, for example, when you visit a city where you have not been in the past: sitting on a plane while approaching the destination, you are probably crowded with mixed ideas, stereotyped beliefs, plans and dreams about what to do, what to see, what to experience during your stay in the place. Put it differently, the unexplored city is a mental object characterised by huge amounts of imagination: it may be unexplored, but not wholly unknown, as the urban destination is most probably populated by layers of meanings, images and expectations. City branding is, essentially, the practice of governing, producing, promoting and shaping these imaginary and emotional elements in order to attract desired global flows, including wealthy tourists, investments, rich residents, members of the creative class, global events, etc.

This book chapter develops an understanding of branding by working on the metaphor of the ghost, or the spectre (the two terms are synonymously used here). The main thesis proposed here is that many urban imaginaries have an ambiguous status, between the visible and the invisible; they are palpable and powerful presences, despite being by and large immaterial and shadowy. City branding may be hence conceptualised as ghostly play, involving managing the visibility and invisibility of urban elements, also by the exercise of summoning, concealing, exorcising and domesticating urban spectres.

In order to develop the argument, the next section provides an overview of literature on ghosts and spectres in human geography and in urban studies. The following section briefly discusses the notion of branding as a politics of representation shaping the relation between the visible and the invisible. Then, the chapter develops the metaphor of branding as a spectral play, and the concluding section presents some final comments and potential lines for further researches and speculations.

### The ghost in cultural geographies and in urban studies

The notion that the city and the urban experience are, by and large, connected to the production and circulation of peculiar imaginaries is a core idea of cultural geography, urban sociology and urban studies in general: it is possible to mention, among the many possible works in the field, the classic contributions of Simmel (1903); Benjamin (1927–1940); Wirth (1938); and Lefebvre (1974). Cities, in fact, are not just physical or lived spaces, but also spaces of the imagination and representation, and – as argued in the previous section of the chapter – the different ways in which cities are imagined produce real and tangible social and political effects (Bridge and Watson, 2003). For example, urbanists, planners and architects have often developed specific visions about how cities are supposed to look, function and develop, visions which have been crucial in shaping plans, buildings and development strategies. Still, representations of the city also circulate through

fictional and artistic products such as novels, films, songs and pictures – be they complex and accurate representations, or rather simple and caricatured ones – influencing, as argued, the conscious and unconscious expectations, desires and imaginations of people, from inhabitants to tourists. It is not a coincidence that cities have been often associated to very different feelings, emotions and attitudes: from spaces of creativity and innovation to spaces of alienation; from landscapes of solitude and individualism, to spaces of freedom and possibility; from spaces of anxiety and fear to scenes of exciting and erotic encounters. In this sense, urban spaces are also, to a certain degree, fantastic spaces, or rather – to use an expression that is central in urban studies and in the logics of this article – they are spaces of phantasmagoria.

The expression *phantasmagoria* has been originally introduced by Walter Benjamin (1927–1940) in order to describe the experience of the modern city, which, due to the use of new technology, assumed sometimes spectacular, sometimes alienating contours, very much like a dream or a ghost. The concept of phantasmagoria emphasises the importance not only of the sphere of the visible and the experience, but also of what that cannot be directly represented, as dreams and – in a metaphorical sense – ghosts (Pile, 2003, 2005; see also Thrift, 2008). The phantasmagoria was originally a form of popular spectacle, which has begun to diffuse in the latter part of the eighteenth century that emphasised the principle of deception or concealment, particularly in association with the presentation of the figure of the ghost (Hetherington, 2005). The phantasmagoria was basically a mix of lantern shows, Chinese shadow play and magic displays, involving the back projection of ghostly images onto smoke or onto a translucent screen hung in the middle of a darkened room around which an audience sat. Hetherington (2005) provides a vivid description of the phantasmagoria: assistants sometimes moved around the audience dressed as skeletons, and the ghostly images of dead historical figures appeared. Projectors were hidden from view, as images were intended to appear as if they just emerged and had a life of their own, independent of any mechanical apparatus for projecting them as images.

The spectacle of the phantasmagoria influenced and inspired a number of theoretical reflections, speculations and development in urban and cultural studies. Walter Benjamin originally mobilised the metaphor of the phantasmagoria in order to provide insights into the modern urban experience, characterised by peculiar forms of commodity fetishism and myth. Drawing on his writings, and mobilising Marxian perspectives, authors such as Lukács (1971); Adorno (1981); Derrida (1993); and Gordon (1997) used the concept of phantasmagoria to develop critical perspectives on commodities, capitalism, socio-political and cultural life (see also Hetherington, 2005, discussing consumption and secondhandedness); Vidler (1992) famously applied the phantasmagoria and the uncanny to the sphere of architecture; and more recently, various authors have developed socio-cultural analysis of ghosts and the meaning of spectres in contemporary societies and in historical perspectives (see Buse and Stott, 1999; Davies, 2007; del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2010, 2013).

There is a rich literature on the social meanings and social histories of ghosts in social sciences and cultural studies (see for example, Finucane, 1982), and in this sense some authors have theorised an ongoing ‘spectral turn’ in social sciences (Luckhurst, 2003). Human geography, and cultural geographies, in particular, have been partly touched by the diffusion of discourses and conceptualisations of ghosts. Specifically, it is possible to classify debates along at least three strands of contributions, and they sometimes overlap.

First, a limited number of works have analysed ghosts in a strict sense, particularly by analysing rumours, stories and tales of ghosts using geographical perspectives. Comaroff (2007) worked on ghostly rumours in Singapore (see also Pile, 2005); Cameron (2008) discussed indigenous ghost stories in Canadian culture; Wylie (2007) and Matless (2008), analysed the works of Winfried Georg Sebald and Mary Butts; Davies (2010) focused on the spatialities of the contact between the physical and the spiritual worlds (see also the vast literature on the geographies of death and afterlife, and particularly Romanillos, 2015); Holloway (2010)

considered ghost tourism; Lipman (2014) worked on haunted houses; and various contributions in Heholt and Downing (2016) analysed haunted landscapes.

Second, the concept of ghost has been used to analyse elements of the past that are repositioned in the present (cf. Wyatt et al., 2016). For example, Edensor (2005, 2008), Swanton (2012) and Hill (2013) have analysed industrial heritages, abandoned factories, working-class spaces and other ruins and elements of the industrial landscape by mobilising the concepts of ghost and spectre in Manchester, in the Forest of Dean and in Dortmund; Maddern (2008) has analysed the spectral presence of migrants in Ellis Island; McCormack (2010) has focused on the remains of an expedition in Arctic island in 1930; Coddington (2011) has discussed the 'spectral' connection between imaginaries of the past and everyday practices in Alaska; Gibas (2013) has focused on spectral heritages of the in the Prague metro; finally, Draus and Roddy (2016) have focused on representations of Detroit, and Detroit's problems, in terms of ghosts and monstrosity in general.

Third, the image of the ghost has been mobilised to highlight the role of absences and invisible presences in the political space, and particularly in cities. This is the case, for example, of Appadurai (2000) and Roy (2013), who discussed housing problems in Bombay and India in general (see also Mbembe, 2003, and the concept of necropolitics), and Pile (2005), who developed a rich body of theoretical developments and research materials concerning 'ghostly city' (basically, Pile's work touches all the three lines of research presented here; see also Nagle, 2017).

This chapter intends to reflect on a political understanding of the ghost, mostly in line with the third strand of the literature in the schematisation presented above. Particularly, the idea of the ghost is mobilised here to emphasise some key features of urban imaginaries and branding. Particularly, by drawing on popular ideas about ghosts, and by taking inspiration by the literature on spectral geographies discussed in this section, it is possible to emphasise some key characteristics of ghostly presences.

First of all, ghosts are in-between the spheres of the visible and the invisible. It is not a coincidence that they are often conceived as 'transparent' subjects, or 'absent presences' belonging to a different time. In fact, ghosts have an indefinite relation with time and history: on the one hand, they seem to belong to a past which is absent today, but on the other hand they manifest their presence in the here-and-now. Put it differently, they are sort of echoes of an absent past. Through their presence and absence, i.e., by appearing and by vanishing, eidolons subvert the flow of time of a place. At the same time, ghosts have a meaningful connection with spaces and places: they apparently belong to specific locations, for example being bounded to the buildings and places in which they once lived and experienced emotions.

Second, ghosts are in-between the reigns of the material and the immaterial. Although they do not have a body in a strict sense, spectres are imagined as characterised by bodily features, such as gender. At the same time, since they do not occupy space in material terms, it is potentially possible to imagine that several ghosts may be located in the same space at the same time, overlapping and visually mixing.

Third, ghosts may trigger very different and meaningful feelings and emotions. They may be friendly, as well as intimidating. Apparently, they cannot hurt the living in material terms, since they do not have a body, but at the same time the encounter with a spectral presence may induce palpable emotional outcomes, including sadness, anxiety, fear and desperation, as well as deep emotional feelings, such as tenderness and nostalgia, and as a matter of fact spells and rituals often aim at summoning specific ghosts.

Finally, ghosts are subjective and relational entities: different subjects may approach and may have very different ideas and understandings of ghosts. In this sense, spectres also destabilise and subvert conventional dichotomies opposing the living and the dead, the material and the immaterial, the real and the unreal.

All these key characteristics of ghosts will be mobilised in the following part of the chapter, in order to develop the metaphor of city branding as a spectral politics of representations.

## Branding and the politics of representation

The scientific literature on city branding and city marketing started developing during the 1990s: 'Selling the city', by Ashworth and Voogd (1990), has been probably the first book in the field, and surely one of the most influential and cited works. The literature is now quite wide and multidisciplinary in nature, including contributions from urban studies and planning, as well as managerial, business and tourist studies (for a review of the literature, see Vanolo, 2017). The variety of different approaches at play is reflected in a multitude of different understandings and definitions of place branding. Moreover, theoretical speculations on place branding often overlap with other concepts and debates developed in the fields of urban studies and human geography, such as contributions on the sense of place, the image of the city, geographical imaginaries and urban representations. In this sense, it is rather difficult to delimitate the concept, and it is worth mentioning that place branding (as well as city marketing and other similar expressions) is not a specific entry in popular encyclopaedias of urban studies, such as the ones edited by Hutchinson (2010) and Gottdiener et al. (2013). In other words, city branding is surely a relevant topic in urban studies, but still it is a concept lacking in rigorous conceptualisations and definitions, at least when compared to other well-known concepts developed in urban studies.

In a broad sense, the expression *city branding* refers to a heterogeneous field of policies aiming at improving a city's position and competitive edge in the market, particularly by 'targeting' specific audiences. In the field of critical urban studies, city branding, hence, has been often framed as a phenomenon related to the rise of the 'entrepreneurial city', that is the tendency in privileging urban boosterism and the pro-active search for economic growth strategies in the governance of cities (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998).

The premise of most city branding approaches is the idea of a growing interurban competition in the global scenario, which means that cities compete one with each other in order to attract various global flows, including – among the others – global flows of residents, tourists, economic activities, investments, hallmark events, headquarters of world organisations, etc. (see Gordon, 1999; Evans, 2003; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). In this scenario, cities are supposed to improve their competitive edge through different kinds of interventions, which basically implies producing urban landscapes that may look attractive and that may fit the expectations of a transnational elite of managers, investors, tourists and members of the creative class (Peck, 2005). City branding typically implies different forms of interventions aimed at improving a city's image, perception, visibility and reputation. This does not mean that branding is mere image-production and to 'sell' the city: it is a much more complex sphere, which may involve infusing sense of trust in the citizens; creating a strong local identity; building a logo; supporting a sense of trust and loyalty regarding the city and improving the city's reputation; improving the local budget, or supporting partnerships between the public and the private. Ultimately, some authors consider city brands as tools which provide strategic guidance for place development, because of place brands' potential to be used as an instrument for visioning (see Ashworth et al., 2015).

This chapter will focus on one of the main components and strategies of city branding – arguably the most popular – that is the construction and communication of celebrative representations of a city (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). More specifically, it assumes a critical stance by conceptualising city branding as a politics of representation (Rossi and Vanolo, 2012), i.e., by assuming that the production, circulation and socialisation of optimistic and attractive representations of cities is a highly political, controversial and contested phenomenon. In fact, by adopting entrepreneurial styles of action and communication, urban elites mobilise cities' images and icons in a way of echoing private companies, even with regard to socially and environmentally relevant goals, such as ecological development and social cohesion (Jessop and Sum, 2000). In this sense, the production of images, discourses and urban representations offers a crucial point of observation for the analysis of contemporary urban politics and related power relationships.

## **Branding: playing with the visible, the invisible and the ghostly in-between**

Of course, cities are composed of a number of different and overlapping images, symbols, labels, and phantasmagorias. Many of these elements are personal and subjective, but at the same time, urban elites enacting branding strategies often try to compose and communicate simplified, univocal, linear and easy-to-communicate representations of cities. To put it differently, the complexity of cities is summarised, schematised, labelled and narrated by evoking and displaying a limited number of iconic images, powerful symbols and celebrative keywords and slogans, such as 'innovative city', 'city of love', 'creative city', 'green city', 'exciting city', 'cultural city' or 'city of arts'. In this sense, city branding may be described as a kind of selective storytelling (Jensen, 2007; Sandercock, 2003): only a limited number of optimistic voices and images will conflate in the representations mobilised in city branding. For example, urban branding campaigns may easily emphasise the presence of vibrant neighbourhoods offering exciting cultural experiences and amenities in a city. However, there is no mention of urban problems such as unemployment, urban decadence in the suburbs and the lack of welfare services. In this sense, urban branding may be a highly controversial terrain: representing a city as a place of pleasure may be offensive, or even violent, in the eyes of those who do not fit into the optimistic picture, such as the unemployed, the homeless or the elderly. City branding hence implies giving visibility and invisibility in a very selective way to different urban issues, landscapes and subjects, ultimately shaping gazes upon the city.

In theoretical terms, visibility is a complex phenomenon, which lies at the intersection of the domains of aesthetics, perception and politics, in relation to power (Brighenti, 2010). The boundary between the visible and the invisible has been theorised in political philosophy in the intricate and influential works of Jacques Rancière (see particularly Rancière, 2000), which mobilise the concept of 'partition of the sensible'. This is a dividing line, constantly on the move, who has both aesthetic and political nature, since looking and interpreting the world are, from the beginning, actions implicitly or explicitly transforming and reconfiguring it. The partition of the sensible is influenced by geographical and temporal dimensions: here, in this place, at this time, a certain subject may count as a problem to be solved; but at another time and place, the same subject may just be invisible (Panagia, 2010). What is considered an appropriate and understandable discourse in one place may become inappropriate and unlistenable in another (Ruez, 2012).

In the framework of the promotion of city images, it may be claimed that branding discourse enacts specific regimes of visibility and invisibility. However, it is useful not to conceive the visible and the invisible as two distinct and separate spheres. By mobilising the idea of the ghost, it is possible to think of a further plain situated in an intermediate position between the visible and the invisible. A number of objects, traces, legacies and stories in the city are in fact apparently non-visible, but they are at the same time relevant and tangible, as kinds of ghosts. Symmetrically, urban policies and branding strategies may metaphorically place specific urban elements and city stories at the centre of people's gazes, as kinds of luxury items in the windows of shops, being actually, to a certain degree, meaningless, ephemeral and phantasmagorical, like spectres. A number of different examples may be proposed to develop the argument.

A controversial example of 'invisible' socio-spatial entities is the case involving mosques in a number of Western cities. These religious buildings often originate conflicts and debates between the local residents, which often look at these 'diverse' religious spaces with suspicion and fear. In addition, mosques are generally absent in dominant promotional images in European and American cities. However, they are obviously important landmarks for Muslim inhabitants. Using Stuttgart as a case study, Petra Kuppinger (2014) has analysed the development of mosques in Germany by Muslim migrants, commenting the fact that these religious spaces are often 'altered' buildings, apparently destined to a different use, such as factories and warehouses. The places of Islamic worship are made deliberately invisible, thus reflecting the continued marginality of the Muslim community (see also Ruez, 2012; Chiodelli and Moroni, 2017). In contrast, mosques are key elements of city images in other parts of the world, such as in many Arab cities, where the Muslim

religion is the majority. (Elshehtawy, 2008). To put it differently, the partition of the sensible originates different thresholds and spheres of visibility in different cities, thereby producing different urban ghosts.

Another possible example may refer to undesired heritages of the past. Consider the case of Soviet legacies in many European cities, often embodied in buildings and material structures bearing the spectres of dark legacies (Czepczynski, 2008). One example may be the 'House of the People' in Bucharest: the world's second largest administrative building, realised in the 1980s because of the will of Nicolae Ceausescu, which was a symbol of totalitarianism. In order to break the connections with the obscure past and to support the image of Bucharest as a democratic and European city, the building has been at the centre of a meaningful re-branding cultural strategy. As analysed by Light and Young (2015), contemporary guided tours seek not to dwell on the past, but instead they focus on the contemporary significance of the building: the palace is presented as the centre of a post-socialist democracy and the meeting place of the Chamber of Deputies, parliamentary committees and the Constitutional Court. The interior design has been slightly modified in order to emphasise pre-socialist influences from Western Europe, to display Romania's historical links with 'Europe', and to present the building as symbol of Romanian talent and creativity. Still, the ghosts of the past are still anchored to the place: many tourists identify the building as 'Ceausescu's Palace' and are surprised, or even disappointed, by the lack of references to him. In an attempt to conceal the ghosts of the Soviet regime, the circumstances of its construction and the purpose for which it was originally built are not mentioned. However, ghosts do not disappear: the palace is often visited by Romanians, sometimes encouraged by a sense of nostalgia, and sometimes by the curiosity and fascination for a building that is definitely popular, if not infamous, within Romania.

A different and relevant example may refer to the geography of ghostly spaces of poverty in many emerging global cities of the Global South. For instance, Leela Fernandes (2006) and Pushpa Arabindoo (2011), using different case studies, have examined the ways in which the rise of an urban middle class in India has been accompanied by representations of the city focused on consumerism and cosmopolitan lifestyles, for example through images of bars, clubs, discos, arts, creative spaces and fashionable shops in gentrifying areas. According to Fernandes, the promotion of vibrant and apparently Westernised lifestyles has implied the adoption of a noiseless politics of forgetting, which has tried to conceal the spaces of the urban poor, and particularly the Indian slums. In many cases, the invisibility of these spaces in mainstream representations – and not just the ones of branding – may be linked to the violent desire of the 'new' and growing Indian middle class to live urban experiences deprived of the contact with poverty and marginality, and to celebrate a nation that is experiencing economic growth. The stereotyped aesthetics of idealised poverty alleviation and asceticism which characterised many representations of Indian landscapes are more and more made ghostly, in order to be substituted by the visibility of the emerging 'new' middle class.

Finally, it is possible to mention the case of the many forms of branding which have been developed in relation to Rio de Janeiro in recent years. The 'cidade maravilhosa', according to a popular slogan, has been recently rebranded as a 'smart city', and it has been awarded at the World Smart Cities Awards in 2013, particularly thanks to spectacular interventions including a control centre for assuring massive surveillance in every corner of the city, and the construction of a 'smart' gondola air elevator, opened in 2011, running just above the favelas of Alemão, the poorest neighbourhood in the city. However, the technological interventions and the 'smart' landscapes which have been introduced in the city may be seen as ghostly presences, as they are irrelevant and useless for a large part of the population, and surely they do not have the power to subvert the imaginary and the stigma of Alemão and other slums as spaces of desperation and marginality. More recently, the city hosted the 2016 Olympic Games, and other hallmark events, which has been strategically mobilised also in order to present to the world as a city that has largely changed, and has overcome many urban problems which characterised and stigmatised the city. However, the ghosts of urban problems are still highly visible to any observer. Everyone knows that Rio is not a smart, technological city in the general sense of the term, that problems of poverty and insecurity still characterise large parts of the

urban space and that the Olympic Games have been a spectacle only for a small quota of the locals. And ghosts of these presences force the partition of the sensible by taking form and assuming visibility in a number of different ways, for example in local graffiti and in protest messages appearing physically on city walls, or virtually in the internet (Maiello and Pasquinelli, 2015).

Summing up, the elements and subjects that are 'out of place' in branding discourses tend to be turned into urban spectres: the ostensible immediacy of their presence is replaced by sorts of ghost that are neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive. But it has to be considered that social, affective and cultural relations are enacted not only around what is there, but also around the presence of what is not, as subjects, buildings and histories may be destroyed and dispersed but they may still persist in a number of forms, including traces, fragments and memories. Their absence is tangible, but their presence is ephemeral, removed from the gaze of the outsider, and sometimes even from the gaze of the many inhabitants. In this sense, city branding does not only imply the production of urban representations, but it also gives birth, summons or conceals urban ghosts.

The circulation of urban ghosts in city branding has surely become more complex in the latest years, because of the proliferation of new technologies, and specifically websites based on reviews of places and tourists' comments. City branding, in fact, is evidently not just produced by policy makers and branding consultants, but it is a coproduction involving a number of social subjects, each one producing discourses, images, shadows and ghosts. This socialisation of place branding has been dramatically accelerated by the development of '2.0' technologies, user-generated contents, crowdsourcing and the diffusion of smartphones, tablets and other digital devices. Brands of course are largely shaped by feedback, ideas, discourses and images generated by users and circulated through Facebook, TripAdvisor, Yelp, Foursquare or Instagram. The so-called 'shared economy' is evidently transforming place brands, as they are more and more 'co-produced' by ordinary people, arguably also by the means of the commodification of their feelings, stories and social relations. This means that the time when city branding campaigns were fully planned by powerful urban managers and communication experts, closed inside their offices, is definitely over, if it ever existed. User-generated content, in fact, may powerfully challenge mainstream narratives. Consider, for example, the case of a negative description of a place, such as a review portraying an urban neighbourhood by emphasising sensations of danger and unsafety. Such urban representation evokes a ghost that may scare some people. In this sense, branding practitioners today have to communicate, shape, take into account and influence the emotions, tastes, desires and dreams conveyed through new communication technologies. The ultimate effect is a process of socialisation of branding that, evidently, does not imply democratisation, because of the obvious fact of different actors that have different power in framing narratives and in producing or concealing urban ghosts.

## **Conclusion**

The metaphor of the ghost allows the development of some lines of reflection on the politics of urban representation that will be briefly synthesised in this concluding section.

The core argument proposed in this chapter is that urban imaginaries are not just made up of what is explicitly showed and displayed in representations, because invisible, absent or ghostly presences may be significant in building and shaping city brands. Specific images, identities, legacies and heritages may be concealed by a promotional brand, but they can ultimately speak back and come to reality like dreams emerging from the depth of the subconscious. For example, former industrial buildings may be reconverted into artistic spaces or cultural icons in order to tell stories of urban regeneration and renewal, but they will be arguably crowded by the ghosts of the workers for a long time. These ghosts will be invisible in the eyes of most visitors, but they will be visible for someone, for example for former workers, and buildings will keep on telling an urban



industrial story, for those who are able to hear and see these ghosts. In this sense, urban ghosts make a bridge across epochs, as they reverberate presences and absences of the past (Edensor, 2005, 2008). These ghosts may cause problems, as in the example of inconvenient memories, but they may also reveal helpful insights in order to brand and to valorise the historical heritage of cities, for example by evoking memories and feelings such as nostalgia. For example, old abandoned buildings, theatres, theme parks or mines may look interesting, evocative and attractive in the eyes of many people, including sophisticated members of the creative class or 'dark' tourists (see Lennon and Foley, 2000; Sharpley and Stone, 2009).

Second, it has been argued that ghosts are not univocal entities, but rather complex, relational and situated processes. Some ghosts are invisible for someone, and visible for someone else. In this sense, certain urban symbols evoke messages and stories in the eyes of some subjects, and not in those of others. In this framework, the eyes of tourists, investors, global elites and members of the creative class seem to be more relevant than the eyes of other subjects (see Peck, 2005): urban brands have to be coherent with their needs, desires and expectations, and disturbing elements have to be removed or made invisible (see Jensen, 2007; Vanolo, 2015). In fact, uncanny ghosts may be inconvenient for brand developers. Poverty, criminality, violence, lack of infrastructure, unemployment, deindustrialisation, social suffering or conflict, are all examples of objects which definitely disturb mainstream celebrative storytelling about cities. In this sense, in a branding logic, these inconvenient elements have to be made imperceptible and invisible, in order not to trouble branding narratives.

At the same time, it has been mentioned that, on a metaphorical level, a number of different ghosts may overlap at the very same space. In this sense, a number of different and potentially conflicting stories, presences and projects cohabit, overlap and sometimes clash in cities. Branding practices selectively display some of them, those recognised as more attractive, thus obliterating the others. Sometimes, even 'good' ghosts are purposely left invisible: this may be the case of most ordinary infrastructures. With the exclusion of 'extraordinary' and 'spectacular' ones, most infrastructures are in fact banal urban elements. They are essential for the functioning of cities, but their presence is useless in order to celebrate cities and to put them on the global map. In fact, as analysed by Kaika and Swyngedouw (2000), these infrastructures are usually made invisible by being buried underground. At the same time, their potential absence or shortage is definitely a problem, which can be again intended as a kind of ghostly presence-absence that has to be managed or concealed.

Although ghosts can be concealed or ignored, they cannot be strictly killed or physically removed, since they belong to a different sphere of existence. In analogy, some undesired elements feeding the image of a city may be made invisible, but they hardly disappear. For example, the presence of slums, spaces at the margins, urban problems, historical heritages, traumas or industrial relics may be highly palpable in cities, despite their invisibility in promotional representations. Branding has to manage these inconvenient ghosts, for example by including them in credible narratives of the place. It is in fact important to avoid developing patently fake representations of the city, which may ultimately promote social dis cohesion and exclusion (see Garrido, 2013; Nagle, 2017).

Finally, the understanding or the perception of ghosts are the outcome of complex social and cultural processes. The origins of many spectres – as well as the origins of urban stereotypes, myths, imaginaries and stigmas – are definitely ungraspable or unknown. It is just the case to mention that, in the current scenario characterised by the growing diffusion of social media and user-generated content, city brands are forged by a growing number of voices. We are observing a progressive (and uneven) socialisation of city imaginaries: brands are relational social constructions, and branding cities today does not mean building top-down promotional messages but rather trying to establish a dialogue and to resonate positively with the many voices and ghosts contributing to the formation of the brand. In this sense, the ultimate idea suggested by

the metaphor of the urban ghosts is that city brands are always the result of processes of co-production, rather than powerful top-down processes.

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